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Cease-Fire Developments

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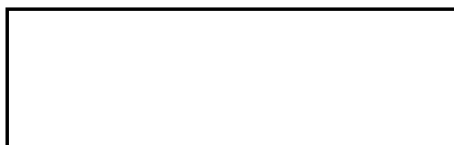
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SOUTH VIETNAMThe Communists' Delta Base of Operations

The US defense attache reports that Communist strength in Chuong Thien Province has been significantly increased. Government control is restricted to the areas immediately surrounding the district and province capitals. The Communists are imposing heavy taxes throughout the province and are able to enter freely most of the province's hamlets and villages. They appear to be establishing the province as a base of operations in the delta.

Since the start of the cease-fire, most of the military incidents initiated by the Communists in the delta have been reported from Chuong Thien Province. Some government officials view this high level of action as a prelude to a Communist campaign to capture the whole province. The defense attache, on the other hand, speculates that the Viet Cong will continue limited operations designed to nibble away at the government's area of control. He maintains that the Communists would gain little by launching heavier military attacks and might provoke a strong South Vietnamese retaliation.

Chuong Thien is among the delta's least inhabited provinces, but its central location and its proximity to key Communist sanctuaries and supply routes from Cambodia gives it a particular strategic importance for the Communists. [REDACTED]

Hieu Criticizes PRG Hard-Liners

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Nguyen Van Hieu, chief of the PRG's delegation to the Paris bilateral talks, had some harsh words for over-zealous PRG colleagues who publicly proclaim the goal of installing a Communist regime in the South. Speaking with Vietnamese sympathizers in Paris, Hieu maintained that:

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--these individuals do more harm than good and should be prevented from pursuing such a line.

--the majority of South Vietnamese are opposed to Communism and the PRG "does not delude itself that it can win the political struggle by advocating Communism."

--PRG tactics have undergone "considerable change" in the past four months, taking greater account of "realities."

Hieu's remarks are consistent with the general line that he established when he was first assigned to Paris in order to present a moderate and conciliatory image of the PRG. Hieu's main purpose in speaking out against his hard line colleagues probably was to counter the increased efforts of the GVN to win over key figures in the Vietnamese exile community in France. Hieu has recently expressed concern over the apparent success of GVN overtures, possibly as a result of pressure from Hanoi to maintain the political offensive in this area. [REDACTED]

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CAMBODIAThe Military Situation

Communist pressure against the government base at Neak Luong has eased somewhat. Small Communist units continue to shell and probe government positions on both sides of the Mekong River near Neak Luong, and fighting continues at outposts around Prey Veng City to the northeast. The Cambodian Navy landed reinforcements and munitions at Neak Luong yesterday and today government troops moved east from the base to relieve a unit that had been isolated on Route 1.

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A Hard Line

An official in Sihanouk's "mission" in Paris is touting recent Khmer Communist military gains in Cambodia as clear evidence that the Lon Nol government will eventually be forced to surrender. He also claimed that the Communists are not interested in negotiations at the present time, since they would merely divide the country into zones controlled by the two sides, and offer the Communists no real advantage. They would be premature because they probably would result in a coalition government--which the Communists reject.

The official, a pro-Sihanouk nationalist, previously had indicated that he hoped the war could be ended quickly and a coalition government formed to prevent the Communists from consolidating and expanding their power. His latest remarks reflect his belief that, since Sihanouk's trip to Cambodia, Hanoi and Khmer Communist leaders have recognized his role and authority as leader of the "resistance movement."

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LAOSThe Military Situation

The number of clashes and skirmishes increased slightly during the period 18-25 May. Military activity remained at a very low level in the north but picked up in the central panhandle where a month long lull in the Muong Phalane area was broken by company-sized enemy attacks south of the town. Lao Army units reported enemy-initiated skirmishes northwest of Muong Phalane and on both sides of the Mekong south of Pakse. Lao Air Force sorties rose from 20 during the previous week to 48 in response to the increased ground activity.

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